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An
Inaugural Essay
on
Dropsy
Submitted to the examination
of the
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By John P. Morison. Rejected March 13th 1823
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An Essay on Dropsy

It is my intention to present, in the succeeding pages, a few observations, upon the Pathology and Treatment of general Dropsy.

Those serous or watery accumulations, which preternaturally occur in the cavities and cellular membranes of the body, have by Nosologists been generally denominated Dropsy. These may take place, without distinction, in persons of any age and of either sex; women however and those advanced in life are said to be most subject to it.

They generally appear as a secondary affection; the remote cause is therefore to be looked for in the previous state of the system, and may be traced to many different origins; frequently, they occur as a consequence of some disorder of the constitution, or obstructions of some of the Thoracic or Abdominal viscera.

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The Pathology of the disease, seems not to have been entirely settled by Physicians, but it appears to be universally acknowledged, that Dropsy depends upon a distruction of balance between the Exhaling and Absorbing vessels.

For certain purposes in the Animal Oeconomy, a fluid is supposed by Physiologists to be secreted by the Exhaling vessels into every interstice and cavity of the body, which is prevented from accumulating, in consequence of being taken up (in the healthy state) by a system of vessels, called Absorbents or Lymphatics.

In what this distruction of balance consists, has constituted the subject of controversy. Dr. Darwin supposed it to be owing to a paralysis of the Lymphatics, the cause of local accumulations he accounts for as being a partial paralysis of these vessels. Dr. Cullen supposed that it depended on debility, and imagined a peculiar state of the system connected with it, which he denominated a "Hydropic diathesis" or "laxity of the Exhalents".

The European Physicians generally, supposed, Dropsy had its foundation in a debilitated state of the system.

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Entirely an opposite opinion has of late been entertained by Dr. Rush, who referred it to a "morbid excitement in the arteries" with a "phlogistic diathesis".

Thus upon two opposite extremes have physicians endeavored to account for this derangement of equability in the two sets of vessels.

The Exhalents too, have by Pathologists been considered as but passive continuations of the large arteries, and continued in their operation by them entirely. Considering them thus, an means of accounting for the various diseased conditions that may occur in them, must be confined to a narrow compass, and be very imperfect. Indeed I cannot conceive, under these circumstances, how the phenomena of their diseased action can at all be satisfactorily explained. Viewing them however as a separate system of vessels, we have a wider field for enquiry; and we will at the same time admit, that by arterial influence, they are as much modified in their action as by any other part or parts of the body.

The human system is intimately connected, one part being dependent on another, so that they cannot be affected,

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without a mutual sensation, this has been called sympathy, and is the connecting link in the chain which binds together the animal fabric.

Pathologists of the present day, endeavour to avoid both shoals of the conflicting doctrines formerly advanced, by steering between them, and they have supposed Dropsy to depend upon a changed state of the vessels, or an error loci in the action of the Arteries analogous to Hemorhage.

It seems to be a law of the animal Oeconomy, that febrile action (if not arrested) will continue, until its excess is exhausted, when it gradually changes into the contrary extreme of debility and feeble action; precisely in this way may the vessels in Dropsy be supposed to act, both the Exhalents and Absorbents, running into a state of debility, forming that condition of Chronic Dropsy, denominated by Dr. Rush the "Atonic".

The disease may therefore be immediately caused, in the first instance, in consequence of the reacting power of the system, being excited into action by stimuli, of whatever kind applied, whether from Fever or local congestion affecting the general system, causing that kind of Dropsy denominated by Dr. Rush the "tonic", or, by

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the application of so great a quantity of stimulant as to cause one thousand times greater quantity of a weakened state constituting the action.

If there is the same loss and action (which by the way can scarcely rather an additional character) Dr Rush means that Lapses occur always either with excessive action or in the contrary very diminished action of the arteries we are disposed to doubt very much the position. It is observed before paralytic strokes that a changed state of the pulse the arteries acting in every place and we can conceive that this cause might either be of a more low or intermediate degree of action.

This was in the 5th lecture of Dr Rush was accused by a very cool all the results of circumstances and points out the mode of treatment which has been most successful though it must be confessed there are great difficulties attending it.

The collections have been divided by Sydenham into different species according to the seat of the disease; but this is a most practical at till the general principles of treatment among the same.

The disease may be partial and affect the Thorax Abdomen

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [

and he has distinguished its frequencies and regularities by hard and slow and have his experiments led to that the latter slower in these cases attended with cut and excitement, if this be the fact it may serve as a confirmation of the state of the pulse.

Treatment.

Purpose of cure of Chorea consists in a demulcent for the bitter acrimony and bitters the Exhalent and Absorbent which the latter may cause a state of blood in the body, the pared indicates the bowels the cure is to relax the spasm down which should cast between them,

By firstly, Reducing colonel excitement colonel generally expressed by copious venesection cutting Calthartics Digitalis &c

Secondly, Stimulating the nervous by the use of Cotton of quill Foxglove &c

Thirdly, Giving strength and tone to the Exhalent and Absorbent vessels and system in general by the use of tonic and stimulating remedies such as gentian & Columbo Cantharides in gout & rheum

iately counteracting the evil by the judicious application of the remedies mentioned.

It is not my intention however to enter particularly into the relative merits of the several of these remedies now usually modified for the undertaking. I consider it sufficient for my present purpose to mention & give a few remarks on the application of a few of the most indispensable that are at present used towards the cure: and first of,

Blood-letting. It will not be necessary if it were to [illegible] to the time when this [illegible] was first applied to the [illegible]. However it suffices to say that it has established itself by its uniformly successful [illegible] employment in this disease. By the unanimous opinion of those of the present day it has been sufficiently proven to establish it as one of the principal remedies. It seems evident to have a superior effect in changing the morbid condition of the blood and thereby overcomes the disease. As to the manner in which bleeding acts in removing this morbid state of the system we are not acquainted, but as to the power of blood-letting in reducing the condition of the arteries we have

acid or an alkali.

Notwithstanding the great advantages accruing to the cattle, it will not alone in all cases restore the stability of the animal so as to make it both complement dangerous: it should therefore be aided by **Cathartics**, if there are predisposing symptoms the bowels should be drained, when there is a tendency to the bowels the latter is then called Hydrocarbon should be given. I recommend Cream of Tartar and Jalap in the proportion of an drachm of the former to two or three grains of the latter, this has recommended by Dr. Chapman, with great confidence.

Dr. Sydenham and other writers, **Emetics** have been recommended as removing the superfluous matter, and as equalizing the circulation. What is meant by an emetic is not made out. I mean that which supposes the "air through which the red pieces from the mouth of the "bolus into the intestines." I am sure that the old "Emetic do operate fully equal to both upper and lower "ends. The after the second or third pint the red does

"not can be found out so much by the secretary acting of the medicine as with a little care and the distribution" "being a more broken down and the demand" "so manifestly opposed by the most injurious consequences" "to the patients." From the known intention which the Board possesses on the subject of the Hospital which we might and in support thereof some publication of the Board.

In endeavoring the order of the Board as well as to secure the said Dr. Douglas has been highly satisfied for benefit to Dr. Whiting's practice since the not the said so favorable effect — in the case of the case of the effect has been to equate for the Board has been fatal to the patients. The general fund the Board gives to the poor of the dead bears no proportion the dire about one quarter of the Board of half a guinea a [illegible] with the health. By giving the small dose of this left to be administered in the order as does not [illegible] effects on efficacy, which sometimes added injurious is a [illegible] dose. The patients are in [illegible] after the [illegible]

of the [illegible] are much overhead and times might then
follow. May it not probably be owing to the sudden and by
what the cloud is lifting, thus obstructing the respiration
in some manner. That a cause is contributing, probably is most
if of course must be allowed to produce such effects by the reaction
of water on the stomach. Dr Wathing says it
often occurs in most violent retching strength being felt
even after or in the act of a light and cheerful pulse but
"on the contrary if the pulse be feeble and irregular the
"contracted pale eyes and skin cold, the sensible body
"soft and flaccid, a consciousness towards sudden falling"
and the injury, on more especially the dangerous effects to follow
"in a kindly manner". On the contrary Dr Rush observes
"I have seen but one epileptic in a child one in
the year 1789 in a young man in the Pennsylvania Hospital
other and that was a young a robust child and with
pulse. Dr Simon says that under the circumstances
of the case of our [illegible] patients [illegible]
[illegible] For the purpose of relaxing the action of the
[illegible] and [illegible] it has been mentioned

by [illegible]. Now as I have seen it is [illegible] with the [illegible] stated also [illegible] with the exception of three cases which were [illegible] in old people and the disease.

Now, at any rate, we have [illegible] the [illegible] and [illegible] the [illegible] that are [illegible] in the case of this disease, or as [illegible] a [illegible] as possible [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

Of the disease [illegible] in the South. There is much [illegible] at present [illegible] [illegible] as an [illegible] and disease [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] in Hydrotherapy and it is [illegible] to be [illegible] in the [illegible] being an article [illegible] [illegible] upon.

With regard to Cauliflowers it might be said that [illegible] [illegible] the [illegible] from. They would perhaps [illegible] little [illegible] to those cases where the [illegible] a deposit, leaved or in a state of [illegible] [illegible] as this [illegible] a hindrance to [illegible] the absorbent [illegible] [illegible] action [illegible] when the [illegible] is seen to be [illegible] and

this objection should be kept in view in the administration.

After the morbid action of the Arteries has been reduced, the several articles of Gentian & Columbo &c, are administered with a view to give strength and tone to the Absorbents, and thus restore that equilibrium which is necessary to health.

Fever, Labour, low Diet, Thirst and Fasting are remedies recorded as having themselves cured the disease; the judgement of the practitioner must be exerted in the selection of these.

If it were necessary, we might add a much number of other remedies, dispersed through the Materia Medica, and which should I endeavour to enumerate them, might constitute a Materia Medica for the cure of Dropsy, as there is scarce a Medicine that at one time or other has not been employed in this disease, the greater part of which might be set down as either useless or inert.)

The local means that have been employed to evacuate the water are, firstly Punctures. These are frequently of service when the body and limbs are very much swelled and distended; they are said however to prove troublesome from the salivation which

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sometimes follows. The same may be said of Scarifications.
Secondly, Paracentesis is an operation sometimes performed to relieve the Thorax or Abdominal cavities; it is now nearly abandoned with regard to the Thorax, the precise seat of the accumulation not being easily ascertained.

As local remedies also which have proved beneficial are, Blisters. It is objected to them however, that they are apt to produce gangrene and mortification in the feet; perhaps if the circulation is very slow and languid, they may have that effect, but I believe it is seldom to be apprehended.

Frictions and Pressure are of advantage in the morenings, the legs being rubbed upwards, and a roller of Flannel applied.

I have thus concluded a short Essay upon general Dropsy. The obligation I am under to fulfil a law of the University, I offer as an apology for the imperfections of the performance.
